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ABSTRACT

Information to assist local school communities in developing successful educational accountability programs is presented in this report. Based on local school district autonomy, educational accountability in Colorado is viewed as a school improvement process, with a focus on student achievement, graduation, and attendance. Information is presented on state board goals; school improvement planning; advisory accountability committees at the school, district, and local levels; standard reporting procedures; community involvement; and available workshops. Three figures are included. (LMI)

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EA 021 515

A HANDBOOK FOR COLORADO EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

PLANNING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT WITH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE

Colorado's educational accountability program is designed to build and strengthen the local building with a team management concept appropriate to its community. This includes aggressive involvement of teachers, staff, principal, parents, and non-parent citizens in helping to determine school building needs, goals, and plans so that the building team can truly go to work on planning its students' success.

It is my goal that every school in Colorado achieve a sense of mission. This mission must produce feelings and emotions. It must make people feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves, something significant and important. Then, it will mobilize effort. The school's mission statement is an image of a desired state of affairs. It is value driven. It is a call to action. John F. Kennedy, in calling to place a man on the moon, created a mission which figuratively sent the entire nation to the moon.

The mission of a school must be significant, durable, and risky but achievable. As a school audits progress toward its mission, it will be important to clarify outcomes, identify data that will verify success, view all current status data, identify gaps, recognize success by celebrating little milestones, and use the mission to design new structures.

Today, more than ever, we must pull together to make sure that positive solutions are found to many complex issues facing our children. Many of these problems go beyond the schoolhouse gates, into the homes and communities. The most exciting thing about public education is the ongoing challenge to provide the very best for our students and it is the quality of the discussions which occur regarding these challenges that facilitate real progress. It is my pledge that the Colorado Department of Education will focus on cooperative action and will work with all segments of the community to achieve the very best for our students.

William T. Randall
Commissioner of Education

State Board Goals

I. Graduation Rate

a. Goal Statements:

Colorado's statewide public school graduation rate will increase by two percent annually from the 1987 rate of 76 percent until it reaches at least 90 percent by July 1, 1995.

(K-3) All Colorado schools will have established procedures in grades K -3 to identify potential at-risk students and provide them with successful learning experiences upon identification.

(4-12) All Colorado schools will have educational programs in place that adequately prepare all students to enter and succeed in their next level of enrollment. These programs will provide students with appropriate skills and will ensure their continuous progress toward graduation from high school.

b. Indicators

Those racial/ethnic and gender groups with currently have low graduation rates have demonstrated proportionally greater increase in graduation rates each year until equity is achieved.

By July 1, 1990, every school district in Colorado has educational alternatives available to assist all students to progress toward graduation.

By July 1, 1992, all Colorado at-risk children under the age of six are enrolled in quality early childhood learning programs.

c. Definition of graduation rate

The percentage of students who receive a diploma in relation to those entering grade nine, adjusted to accommodate transfers.

II. Attendance Rate

a. Goal Statements

(K-12) Colorado's public school attendance rate will improve from the 1981-87 average rate of 92 percent to 95 percent by July 1, 1995.

b. Indicators:

Each year, all Colorado school districts certify their attendance rate as part of the annual reporting cycle to the state.

School districts certifying an attendance rate below 95 percent have a process to improve attendance in their annual plan.

c. Definition of student attendance:

The student is present where assigned and engaged in the educational process of thedistrict.

III. Student Achievement

a. Goal Statements:

By July 1, 1995, Colorado's public school system will have demonstrated continuous, measurable and significant gains in educational achievement for all student groups.

By July 1, 1991, Colorado's school districts will have defined their expected student proficiencies at designated grade levels, and will have implemented a program of measurement and reporting.

By July 1, 1995, all Colorado high school graduates will receive a diploma certifying that they possess the skills deemed by the local board of education to be necessary for entry to the work place and post-secondary education.

b. Indicators:

By July 1, 1995, the scores of all student groups in the statewide assessment sample have increased by five percentile points.

Any performance discrepancy in the statewide assessment sample among racial/ ethnic and gender and other minority student groups has been reduced with each successive assessment until equity is achieved.

Between 1989 and 1995, all Colorado school districts have increased the percentage of students successfully attaining educational outcomes as defined by their district's plan for student achievement.

Between 1989 and 1995, all Colorado high schools have continually increased the percentage of students completing advanced classes from racial/ethnic and gender groups not traditionally represented.

c. Definition of student achievement:

An expected or anticipated knowledge, skill, attitude, or behavior resulting from a planned instructional program, the attainment of which can be demonstrated through discernible or measurable outcomes.

I. OVERVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The purpose of this handbook is to acquaint boards of education, school and district level accountability committees, teachers and administrators with the requirements, responsibilities and timelines involved with educational accountability in this state. Colorado's educational accountability program emphasizes (1) the school improvement planning process which significantly involves the community, and (2) public disclosure of a school's educational outcomes. This handbook will assist local school communities in developing successful local educational accountability programs.

Decision making in Colorado is highly decentralized. One of the best examples of grassroots decision making in this state is the governance of public education. The Colorado State Constitution and statutes provide considerable autonomy to local boards of education.

In the early 1970s, numerous states passed accountability laws with Colorado's Educational Accountability Act of 1971 being one of the nation's first. At the outset, Colorado's State Board of Education determined that an important part of accountability was the involvement of the community in planning for school improvement.

Today, Colorado's version of educational accountability is nationally recognized as an effective school improvement process. Many Colorado school districts rank among the nation's best at long range planning for school improvement.

Since 1980, educational accountability has been incorporated into state accreditation. To be accredited by the State of Colorado, a school district must meet essential state standards including active accountability committees at both the school and district levels. State expectations for school improvement planning and performance are supervised through the state accreditation process. Figure 1, page 5, summarizes the planning relationship between the school, the school district, and the state.

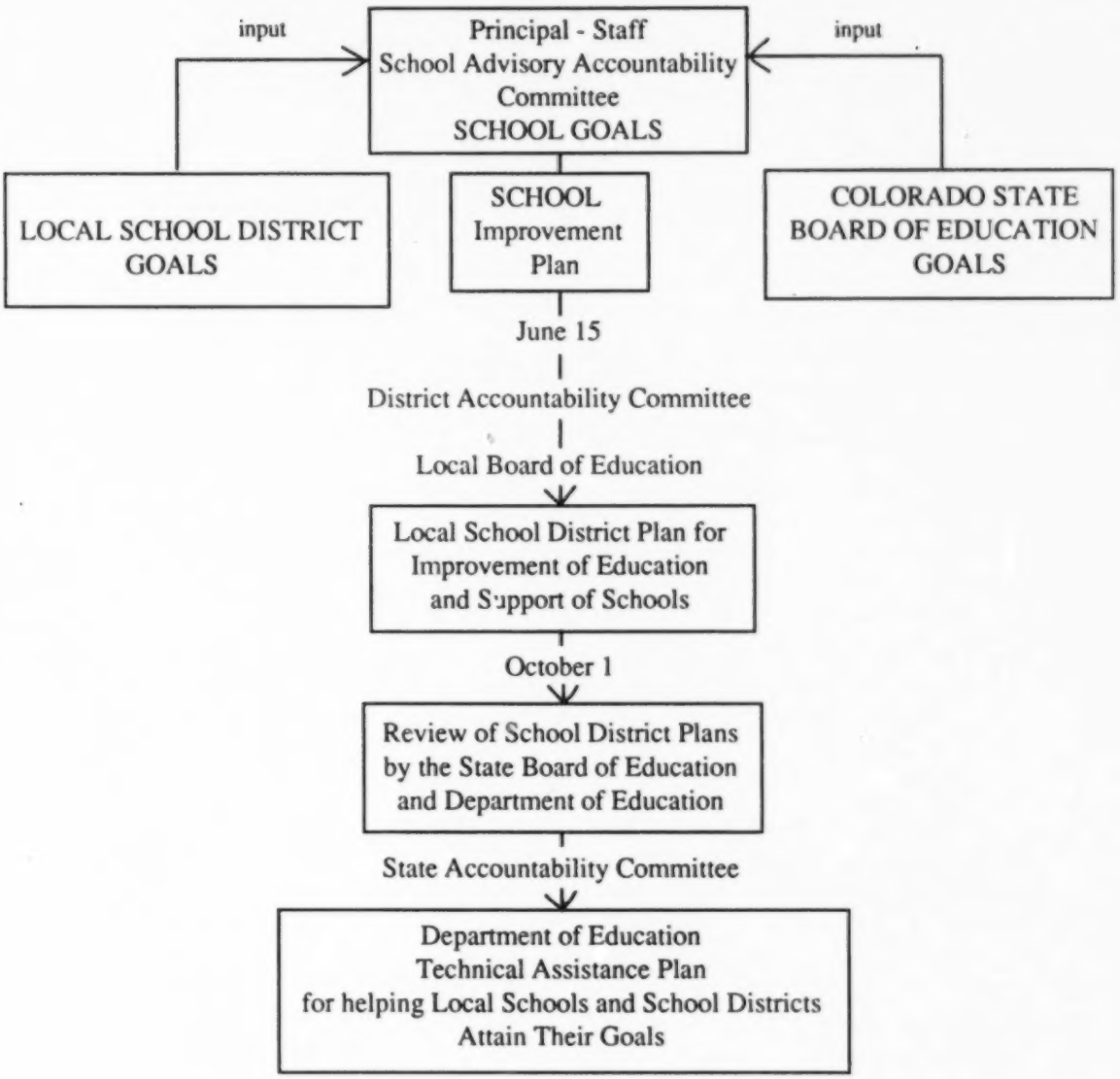
In accordance with the Public School Finance Act of 1988, the State Board of Education set high statewide goals for Colorado's student achievement and graduation rates. The state accreditation rules administer Part 2 of the Finance Act and the Accountability Act of 1971. The result provides high expectations for Colorado schools but has left the authority with local boards of education for determining the best educational goals and programs for each school.

In Colorado, school level educational accountability has increased in importance. State expectations for meaningful community involvement in the school improvement planning process are higher than ever. Critical questions are being asked. Will the local school improvement planning process reduce school dropout rates, increase attendance, and improve the graduation rate of Colorado's public schools? Will the process improve the academic achievement of all public school students? Colorado has an opportunity for demonstrating to the entire nation a unique approach to school reform. Persuasive evidence that each of our public schools are making steady progress toward local and state goals for improvement student achievement and graduation rates will be powerful testimony.

Arthur J. Ellis
Assistant Commissioner
Office of Accountability and Accreditation Services

FIGURE 1

COLORADO EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY
SCHOOL-DISTRICT-STATE RELATIONSHIPS*



The accountability process is going on simultaneously at the school, the district and the state level. At each level is a representative accountability advisory committee whose role is to help pull together and interpret baseline data, outcomes and needs information, recommend priorities and report results.

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*Adapted from Aurora and Poudre R-1 School District Planning Charts.

II. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

By June 15 of each year the principal of each school, with the assistance of the school accountability committee and school staff, must adopt ambitious goals and plans to improve graduation rates and student achievement. Figure 2 on page 10, summarizes the school level accountability planning process. The goals shall be consistent with, but not limited to, the State Board of Education Goals. While the planning process varies from school to school, it generally includes some of the following:

A. Mission

A mission statement is a brief statement of philosophy, values and beliefs about the purpose of the school. Usually the school's statement is a reflection or restatement of the school district mission statement.

B. Vision

A statement of vision is a description of the ideal learning environment for the future. It is developed by the community and school as a consensus document. It includes beliefs about the nature of human growth and the school structures which support effective teaching and learning. This statement enables the school accountability committee to ask how the school reflects the vision and whether proposed improve ments move the school closer to the vision.

C. School Assessment

A variety of information should be collected and used so that the improvement process is based on reliable data as well as on people's beliefs. Such information may include: student achievement results separated by racial/ethnic and gender student populations, graduation rates, student promotion rates, percentage of students per forming at or above grade level expectations, quality of instruction, school climate, engaged learning time, level of school-home communications and involvement, surveys of community and parental aspirations, graduate surveys, feedback from universities and employers and knowledge about research and effective practices.

D. School Profile

Assessment information should be compiled into an understandable snapshot of the school used to measure and report progress toward achievement of the school's educational goals. The profile describes baseline data reflecting current information and depicting change as the school works toward its improvement goals. A profile should be focused, relatively brief and capable of being readily understood. A profile need not describe everything which might be used by staff and the accountability committee in setting goals.

1. Before Developing a School Profile, the Following Questions Should Be Addressed:

   a. Is there a clear profile of student and school performance in the areas where goals have been adopted?

   b. To whom will the profile be reported and how might it be used?

   c. What indicators of school quality are now systematically evaluated?

   d. What information/data does the school or district already collect or have available?

   e. What data could be used to show quality and progress in a profile?

   f. Are there elements of the curriculum and program review such as North Central Accreditation evaluation and textbook adoption which could be used in the profile?

2. Basic Elements of a School Profile:

   While each school should design its own profile, the following suggestions are important elements:

   a. Indicators of Student Outcomes:

      Grades, ACT results, measures of critical thinking and problem solving, pupil assessments, performance recognition, participation in advanced placement programs, graduation rates, criterion tests and standardized achievement tests;

      Measures of self-concept, social/life skills, personal development, employability skills and attitudes, student ethics and values;

      Post-secondary education participation, employment and GED participation.

   b. Indicators of Student Behavior:

      Dropout rates, attendance, suspensions, participation in extracurricular activities, responsibility development and mobility rates.

c. Effective Instructional Practices:

Time on task, daily student success records, homework practices, educational access equity, library data, and teacher qualification, preparation, and experience.

d. School Climate:

Empathy and respect for students, teachers and parents, positive learning environment, student and teacher satisfaction and morale and recognition practices, and teacher involvement with parents and the community.

e. Indicators of Community and Parent Information:

Population and economic descriptions, social economic status, ethnic distribution, family composition, and home backgrounds.

f. Attitudes and Perceptions:

Parent satisfaction, employer feedback, community perceptions, and parent involvement.

E. School Goals and Improvement Plan

High, but achievable, goals and objectives developed by the school are the foundation for the building improvement plan. The plan should include not only action plans for achieving the goals, but also acknowledge the organizational structures which will be used to achieve the measurable objectives, timelines, costs and reporting expectations.

F. Evaluation of the Plan and School Effectiveness

An evaluation plan should be developed which covers both improvement activities and school effectiveness. Evaluation of the school plan is focused on those priorities contained in the plan. At the same time, the school's learning goals and vision should be incorporated into an on-going evaluation of school effectiveness.

G. Reporting Results

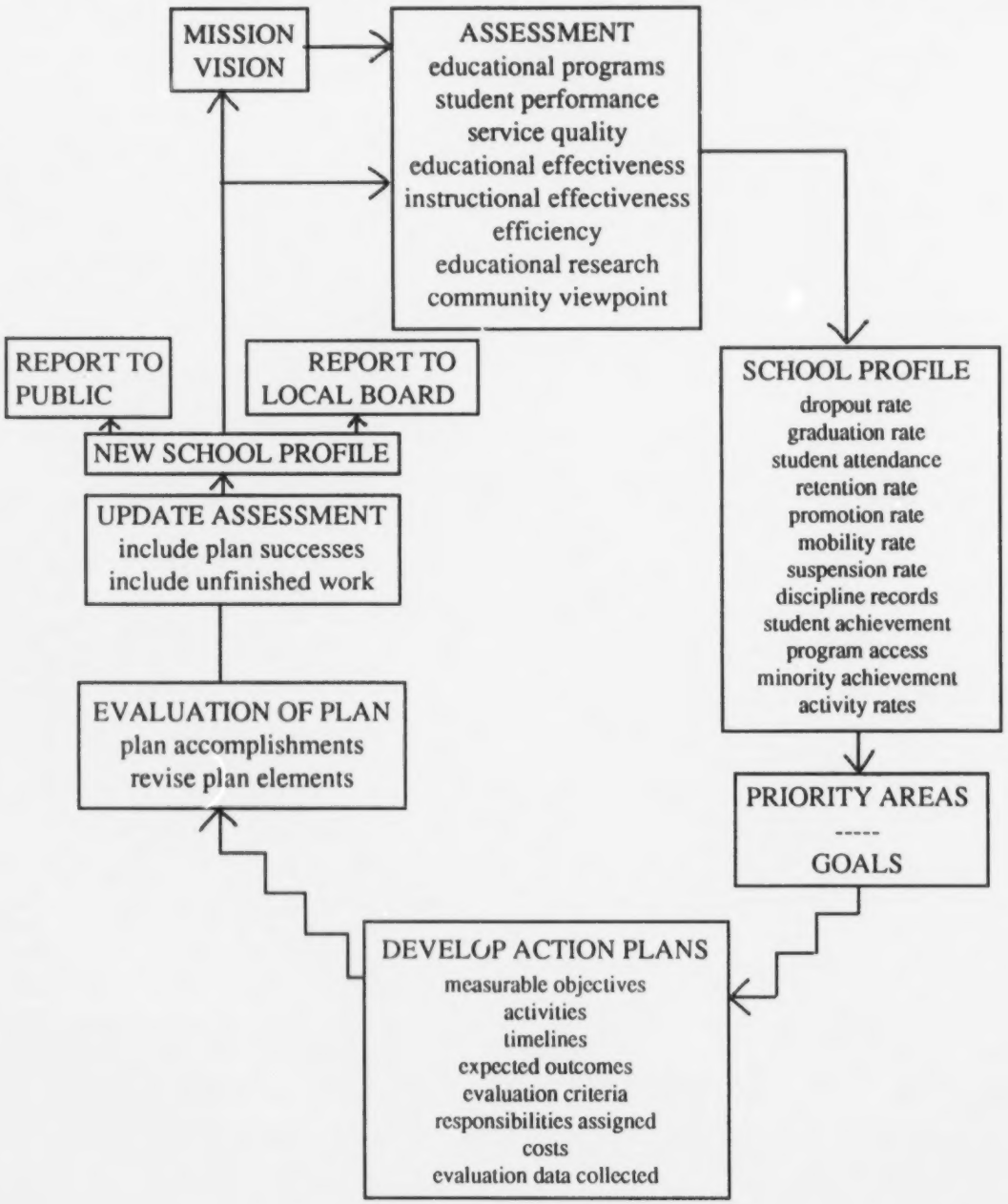
Some reports are required by law and additional reporting may be requested in the school improvement plan. Reporting is disclosing to the public how the school and students are doing. Figure 3, on page 11, summarizes the requirements and timelines for reporting. A written annual report to the local board of education, staff, students, parents and community must include:

1. Results of the school plan to improve educational achievement and maximize attendance and graduation rates for all students reported by June 15 each year (beginning in 1990).

2. Student achievement information including results of norm referenced tests reported for the grades tested in accordance with the standard reporting procedures. A school shall further report achievement data for all racial/ ethnic and gender populations. Reporting of student achievement by grade levels or other subpopulations is not required when this involves reporting results for a group of ten or fewer students.

FIGURE 2

SCHOOL LEVEL ACCOUNTABILITY PLANNING PROCESS

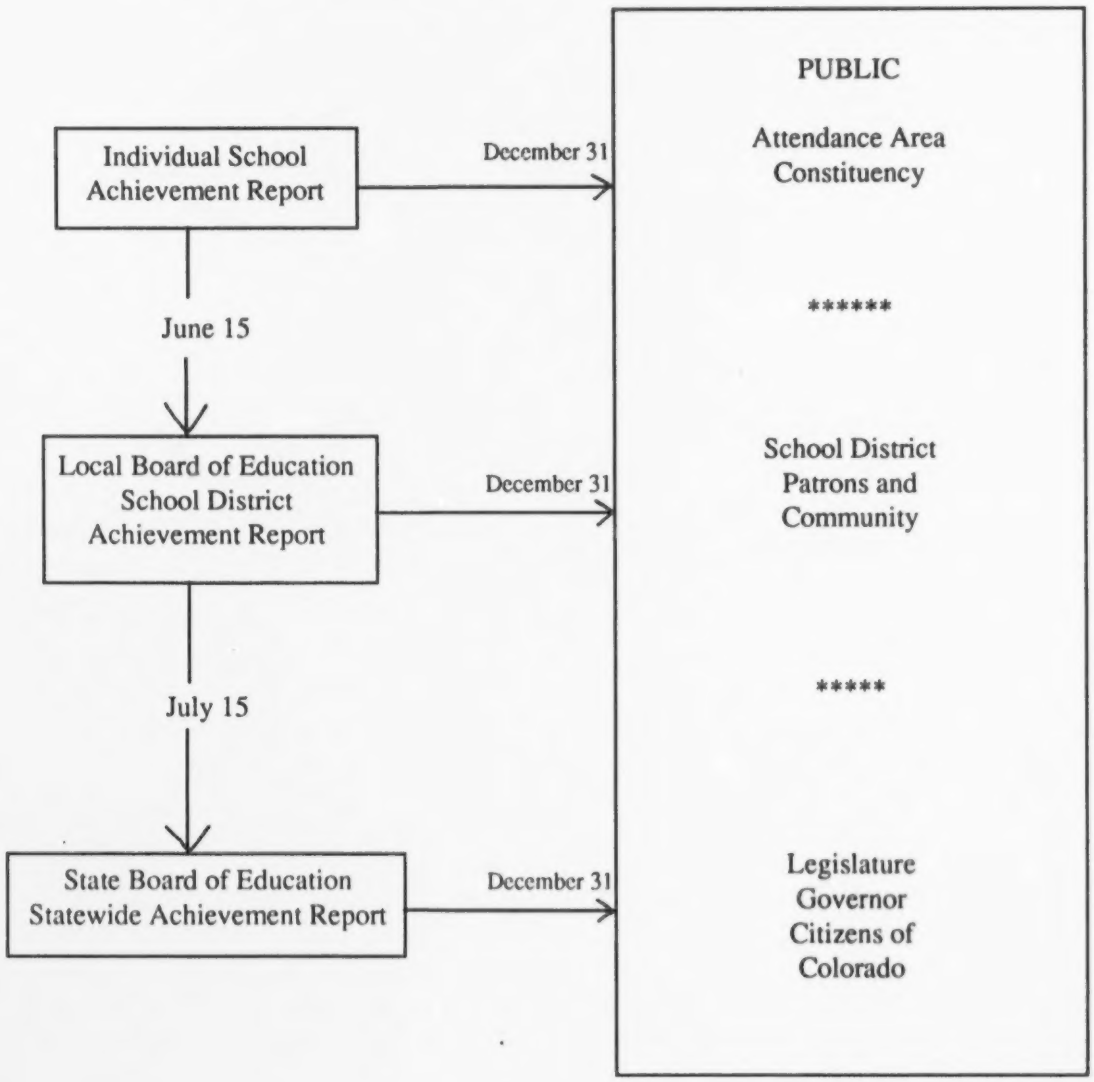


Educational accountability involves the total school community in judging the quality of the school, assessing needs, setting goals and measurable objectives, developing action plans and reporting results to parents, staff and community.

FIGURE 3

COLORADO EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

REPORTING ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS AND PLANS



III. SCHOOL ADVISORY ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

The School Finance Act of 1988 establishes a school advisory accountability committee for every public school in Colorado. Upon written approval of the Commissioner of Education, the district advisory accountability committee may fulfill the requirements for the school building advisory accountability committee in districts with special circumstances in which it may be duplicative to have separate school building advisory accountability committees [1 CCR 301.1, 2202-R-3.05].

A. Membership

The size of the school advisory accountability committee and length of terms of the members are established by guidelines from the local board of education. The membership must, however, consist of a broad representation of the school community and have a goal of balancing the membership consistent with racial/ethnic proportional representation of the school attendance area.

B. Assistance

The principal of each school is responsible for the annual cooperative development of a school improvement plan and for involving the school building advisory accountability committee, staff, other community members and when appropriate, students in the process. The area(s) of study shall be cooperatively developed by the principal and the building advisory accountability committee and reviewed at least annually.

IV. SCHOOL DISTRICT EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Accountability Act of 1971, as amended, requires each local board of education to establish a program of accountability to measure the efficiency and adequacy of educational programs. In addition, the State Board of Education requires that local boards of education adopt organizational procedures for the accountability programs and the advisory accountability committees of the school district [1 CCR 301.1, 2202-R-3.04 (3)]. The board of education in each school district is responsible for the district's educational accountability program and its implementation [22-7-104, C.R.S.].

A. Planning Requirements:

1. The local board of education shall submit a district plan for improving education to the State Board of Education by October 1 of each year [1 CCR 301-1, 2202-R-3.07 (4)].

2. The local board of education shall consult with the district advisory accountability committee and review the committee's recommendations prior to the board's adoption of the district's goals and plans.

3. The district plan shall specify how the district intends to, consistently from year to year, measure educational achievement in its schools using a standard reporting procedure. The district plan shall also provide for the measurement of graduation rates. (State procedures for calculating graduation rates will be coming from the Department of Education in the spring of 1989).

B. District Reporting Requirements [1 CCR 301-1, 2202-R-3.09 (2)]:

1. The local board, with the advice of the district accountability committee, shall survey parent, staff, student and community needs and desires for information about the district and its schools at least once every five years.

2. The district shall report, in written form, results of its annual improvement plan to the State Board of Education by July 15 of each year.

3. By December 31 of each year an annual written summary report about the district shall be provided to all staff, parents and students by the district. Reports will be provided to district residents without school age students using appropriate means such as radio, newspapers, television, or a written report available throughout the community.

4. Composition of the written annual summary district report to the public shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

a. District goals and long-range plans.

b. Results of the plan to improve educational achievement and maximize attendance and graduation rates for all students.

c. Information from the district advisory accountability committee about its accomplishments.

d. Student achievement information including, but not limited to, results of college entrance tests and results of norm referenced tests reported for the district.

e. Student dropout and graduation rates.

f. Revenues, expenditures, costs of various segments of district or school operations and costs of programs for improvement.

g. District results from the Colorado Assessment Program if all Colorado students in the selected grade(s) were assessed.

V. STANDARD REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR ACHIEVEMENT DATA

A. Specific Form for Standardized Achievement Tests Required Information

Who:
- Grades Tested
- Inclusion/Exclusion Policy
- Number of Students Tested in Grade(s):

What:
- Instrument: Standardized Achievement Test Battery Used: Name, Edition/Form, Level(s), and Publisher
- Reference Point: Norming/Standardization Dates and Local Testing Dates
- Areas Covered: Reading, Language and Mathematics Tests as Minimum

Results:
- Score(s) Reported: Scores for Reading, Language and Mathematics
- Metric: National Percentile Ranks
- Average Score(s): Consistent Use of a Measure of Central Tendency with the Measure (Mean or Median) Specified

B. Optional Information

* Distribution of Test Scores such as Percent of Students in National Quartiles and/or Top and Bottom Deciles or Quarters and/or Top and Bottom Tenths as Defined by Local Student Test Scores
* Trend Data—Changes in Achievement over Time
* Scores Expressed in Annual or "Rolling" Norms
* Special Norms such as High Socio-economic status, Low Socio-economic status, Urban, Building Norms
* Background variables such as length of time in district, family background, bilingual, etc.
* Demographic Data for Schools and District
* Confidence Intervals or Error Bands for Test Scores
* Reporting of Test Scores in Other Metrics such as Grade Level Equivalents or Normal Curve Equivalents

C. Possible Student Outcome Measures

Measure	National	State	Local
Dropout Rates		x	x
Graduation Rates	x	x	
Student Attendance Rates*		x	x
Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Grades 1,3,6,9, and 11	x	x	x
Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Grades 4,7, and 10	x	x	x
Public Opinion Polls	x	x	x
New Opinion Polls	x	x	x
National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)	x		x
NAEP Mathematics Standards	x	x	x
Folloow-up of Graduates*		x	x
Follow-up of Dropouts*		x	x
Co-curricular Activities*	x	x	x
Extracurricular Activities*	x	x	x
Secondary Course Enrollments*	x	x	x
Advanced Placement Course Enrollments*	x	x	x
Community Involvement*		x	x
School Climate		x	x
Suspension Rules/Rates*	x	x	x
Other National Education Statistics		x	x
Retention Rates*	x	x	x
Promotion Rates*	x	x	x
Student Mobility Rates*	x	x	x
Writing Assessment Grades 3,6,9, and 11		x	x
ACT/SAT Results	x	x	x
Norm-Referenced Tests	x		x
Criterion-Referenced Tests	x		x
Performance Assessment Measures	x		x

* Would require development efforts at CDE and additional data collection.

VI. SCHOOL DISTRICT ADVISORY ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

By law, the local board must appoint a district advisory accountability committee to advise the board relative to the accountability program. In addition, the district advisory accountability committee is required to compile and review the school level goals, objectives and plans and make recommendations to the local board of education [22-7-104 C.R.S.].

A. Membership

The size of the local district advisory accountability committee and the length of membership terms are established by the local board of education. The district committee consists of at least one parent, one teacher, one school administrator and one taxpayer from the district. The committee must have a goal of balancing the membership consistent with racial/ethnic proportional representation of the district [1 CCR 301.1, 2202-R-3.04 (5)].

B. Assistance to Committee

The district superintendent or superintendent's designee shall serve as a resource person to the district advisory accountability committee [1 CCR 301.1, 2202-R-3.04 (7)].

C. Responsibility

The district advisory accountability committee reviews the school improvement plans and makes recommendations to the local board of education prior to the board's development and adoption of the district's goals, objectives and district plan to improve educational achievement. The Committee may advise the board related to the following questions:

1. How well is the district accountability program working?
2. Are all appropriate school district practices measured for efficiency?
3. Do the district's measures of efficiency produce reportable information?
4. Is the district's measurement of the quality of education adequate?
5. Does the district's measurement of quality provide persuasive evidence of progress toward district goals?
6. Is the school district reporting adequate information to the public related to the efficiency and quality of its educational programs?

7. Does the planning process at each school significantly involve the community?

8. Do principals and school advisory accountability committees have adequate information relative to the quality of their educational programs to assess needs, set goals, implement plans and evaluate the results?

9. Are there improvements which could be made in the school and district educational accountability programs?

VII. STATE ADVISORY ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

The State Advisory Accountability Committee is a legally constituted body appointed to assist the State Board of Education in an advisory capacity on matters of accountability, accreditation and policy development [22-7-103, C.R.S.].

A. Membership

Three of the members of the state advisory committee are appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; two of the members of the committee are appointed by the President of the Senate; five members of the committee are appointed by the Governor from among those persons who are currently serving or have served as members of boards of education in Colorado; and seven of the members of the committee are appointed by the State Board of Education, three of whom are classroom teachers and three of whom are public school administrators. The State Board has chosen to use the seventh appointment to place a student member on the committee.

VIII. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

One of the major challenges facing Colorado educators is the integration of significant community involvement into the school improvement planning process. Many of the school improvement models used in Colorado's schools effectively involve the school's instructional staff but do not provide for significant involvement of the parents and community members. Neither rubber-stamping nor confronting staff decisions provide a satisfying sense of involvement with school improvement. Perhaps the most important skills for a principal to possess are those relative to community involvement and team building. Following are a few principles to guide educators in this important arena:

A. Clear Role and Purpose .

Studies indicate that one of the biggest impediments to adult participation on committees is vagueness in purpose and duty. A school needs a well-organized plan describing the role, duties, function and goals of the committee. The plan should set forth the relationships and communication network between the community, the advisory accountability committee, principal, school staff, district accountability committee and board of education.

B. Involvement Strategies.

1. The principal or designee must serve as an intermediary who understands both the culture of the community and the culture of the school.

2. The school advisory accountability committee must understand how, when and where to assess the needs of the school and the needs of the parents and members of the community with regard to the educational performance of their children.

3. The principal or designee must help antagonistic attitudes and behaviors surface and state what needs to be addressed and handled in a nonthreatening manner for all participants. The need to resolve issues, concerns and fears cannot be left to chance and is best accomplished in an open environment.

4. An information processing technique must be used that generates needs statements; allows for open, sometimes negative interaction; and transforms those statements and interactions into roles, mission statements, goals and objectives that address the improvement of academic performance of students.

5. Conflict can be a healthy change tool and indicator of progress. Management of conflict so that it is a constructive rather than destructive process requires skill in group interaction and decision making.

IX. RESOURCES

EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY WORKSHOPS

Contact your CDE Regional Field Coordinator, phone (303) 866-6636 for information about the following training workshops:

Effective District and Building Accountability Programs
Community Involvement
Team Building
Conflict Management
Accreditation Requirements
Effective Reporting to the Public
Developing School Profiles for Educational Accountability
Long-Range Planning
Strategic Planning
Linkage Analysis Planning
Developing Partnerships with Business/Industry
Assessing your Community
Auditing the Educational Performance of Your Schools
Recruiting Parents of Minority Students for Your Accountability Team
Gender/Ethnic Expectations Student Achievement
Equity in Education
Building/Classroom Equity Assessment
Reducing Gender and Ethnic Disparities in Your School